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## ABSTRACT

The study and teaching of literature is the emphasis of this special journal issue. The nine articles included in the issue discuss the following: (1) time and social class in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," (2) Robert Frost's "Yankee Ironist," (3) an approach to teaching "Moby Dick," (4) using games to review literature, (5) reading the writing of John McPhee, (6) a structured format for writing about literature, (7) literacy and learning in the United Kingdom, (8) a love affair with the library, and (9) evaluating novels for young adults. (HTH)

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# the english RECORD

VOLUME XXXIII

WINTER 1982

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Robert Frost



"A Rose  
for Emily"

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Ishmael  
of Moby Dick

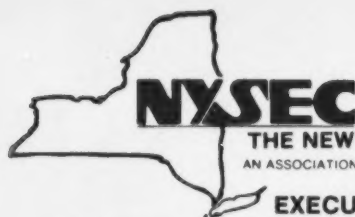
## The Study and Teaching of Literature

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## For the Record

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## Editors'

## Notes

THIS IS OUR third year as editors of *The Record*, and in keeping with the "tradition" we have established, the first issue of the year is again devoted to literature. Without apologies, we again include some examples of literary analysis along with the articles on teaching and curriculum. We like them and hope you do, too.

As we indicated in the last issue, however, we are not unaware that the place of literature in the curriculum is in considerable jeopardy these days. Squeezed between censors on one side and demands for more attention to basic literacy on the other, English teachers may find themselves with nothing but pabulum to teach and little time to teach even that.

Can the teaching of literature be defended? If so, on what basis? These are questions that all of us have thought about and have answered to one degree or another.

Probably, among ourselves, we justify literature in terms of "culture," in both senses of that word. That is, we believe it necessary to expose students to English and American "culture" as expressed in literature and at the same time produce graduates who are "cultured" people. The trouble with these two goals is not just the doubts about whether we achieve them; the more serious problem is that they do not address current public concerns about basic literacy. How cultured can our kids become, the public may ask, if they can't read or write? That's certainly a legitimate question, and thus our defense of literature will be stronger if it answers the question.

A possible answer might begin with the fact that, popular conceptions notwithstanding, most schoolchildren in America can read and write passably well. Most research that we have read demonstrates this. However, the research also shows that far too many kids never get beyond "passably well." That is, they can read the surface story line but cannot see that there

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**Head, Art Department, East High School**  
**Rochester, NY**

is more to a piece of writing than a story line—something which is true of all adult writing, from the simplest news story to the greatest literature. In like manner, they can put words on paper in a fairly grammatical way, but the words often don't say anything worth reading. Another way of putting this is to say that kids can read and write, but they cannot do so with sufficient depth.

Here, then, is a reason to teach literature. Even when we teach literature badly (regrettably, some of us do that), ending up with kids who "hate literature," we at least get across the idea that there is more to a poem or short story than what appears on the surface. Teaching that single principle, along with the skill of finding what's below the surface, is the main business of the literature teacher; it is not the main business of anyone else,

though certainly teachers in other disciplines must also deal with it.

We could, it is true, teach the same principle and skill with other types of writing besides literature. Many of us do. But in literature the existence of something beyond the story line is more obvious than anywhere else, partially because the author consciously puts it there. Everyone perceives that, although most may not be able to identify specifically what it is. Students who learn to dig out what is there and explain their discoveries are then in a better position to infer the reporter's unstated assumptions behind the news story or the scientist's assumptions behind the tables of data. That's what *real* reading is all about, and students' reading and writing scores will not go beyond minimal competence until they can do it.

## Faulkner's Rose to a Dying Tradition: Time and Social Class in "A Rose for Emily"

WILLIAM FAULKNER's "A Rose for Emily" is considered one of his most effective symbols of the fall of the Old South.<sup>1</sup> Interwoven through the story are techniques and themes common in Faulkner: an interest in the relation of the social classes, particularly the relation of old Southern aristocracy to the rising post-war working class; the relationship of the past to the present; and an unusual narrative voice and use of language.

Central to this story on the fall of the Southern aristocracy is the idea of place within the social order. This is represented not only through the relation of the North and South but through race and particularly through social class. The relation of the North and South is epitomized through the arrival of Homer Barron. Among his faults, in the eyes of the townspeople, is not only that he is a day laborer, hence highly unsuited for Emily, but he is a Yankee — a Northerner as well. "Homer, a big dark ready man with a big voice and eyes lighter than his face" is at first taken by the town as an interest for Miss Emily. The "ladies" collectively state that a Grierson "would not think seriously of a Northerner — a day laborer." Homer Barron, his name reminiscent of the blind Homer on the one hand and the barren home of Miss Emily and the sterility of the Old South on the other, causes stronger feelings in the older people who said that even the grief over her father would not cause a "real lady" to forget "*noblesse oblige*." Of interest to us here is the fact that the town considered Emily "a real lady," hence forced her to maintain that position.

When the tax collectors, themselves symbols of the modern generation, arrive

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at her home, Emily vanquishes them. She exempts herself from the normal duties of the town — in this case, the legal duties. "I have" she says "no taxes in Jefferson." Even with the modern generation, she succeeds in maintaining her exemption from both public matters and manners. She therefore retains her exclusiveness both legally in terms of the taxes, morally in terms of her rejection of the moral tone represented by the women in the town, religiously by her vanquishing of the Baptist minister, in the same way she vanquished the Board of Alderman, and the same way she denies and rejects progress when she refuses to have a mail box attached to her house. Important in our consideration of the story, though, is that the town has to allow her to get away with it.

That she is exempt from the normal obligations of the town, as in the case of the taxes, is demonstrated in the townspeople's description of her. At the period in her life when she was described as a "small fat woman in black, her skeleton small and spare," her overweight is described as "what would have been merely plumpness in another was obesity in her." Like her role in society, what was acceptable for others in the town is unthinkable for Miss Emily as the last of the Griersons.

Emily's place within the social order of Jefferson is further demonstrated through repeated references to her as a monument or through comparisons to some artifact or religion. In the very first sentence, we find her regarded by the men as a monument. The fact that this monument has fallen is of dual importance: Emily Grierson — supposedly a "fallen woman" — is the last of the southern aristocracy in Jefferson, and is in fact a fallen monument to a lost tradition. Furthermore, Miss Emily is repeatedly contrasted to those who fell in the Civil War. Her burial is not described as joining her family in the

cemetery but rather joining "the representatives of those august names (of other aristocrats) where they lay in the cedar-bemused cemetery among the ranked and anonymous graves of Union and Confederate soldiers who fell at the Battle of Jefferson." Like them, she is described as "fallen" not simply as having "died." The effect of her death on the community, then, is continually described in terms comparing it to the fall of the South at the end of the Civil War. Miss Emily is the last monument to the tradition of the old south.

Emily, we also find out, is regarded in much the same way as going to church. Children and grandchildren of her contemporaries were sent to her for china painting lessons "in the same spirit they were sent to church on Sundays with a twenty-five cent piece for the collection plate." She's a traditional regularity in whom the townspeople have an unquestioned belief. She is compared to the angels in the church windows, and to an idol in niche — to be blindly worshiped and revered. This does not affect her behavior, however — "she carried her head high enough" — even when the town believed that she was fallen. "It was as if she demanded more than ever the recognition of her dignity as the last Grierson; as if it had wanted that touch of earthiness to reaffirm her imperviousness." Emily is described as a tradition, a duty, and a care; a hereditary obligation upon the town. She is described as "passing from generation to generation — dear, inescapable, impervious, tranquil, and perverse".

Through this story of the decline of the Southern Aristocracy, questions such as the following are raised: what is the relationship between the past and the present? Does Emily as a representative of the old order triumph or is she in fact representative of the defeat of the Old South from within rather than without? This in sum gives us the dilemma of the

relationship between the southern past and the southern present. That the theme of the relation of the past to the present is central to the story is identified by Faulkner himself. At Miss Emily's funeral the old men in their Confederate uniforms talked of Miss Emily "as if she had been a contemporary of theirs, believing that they had danced with her and courted her perhaps, confusing time with its mathematical progression, as the old do, to whom all the past is not a diminishing road but, instead, a huge meadow which no winter ever quite touches, divided from them now by the narrow bottle neck of the most recent decade of years."

The ordering of events in the story exemplifies this position. As Faulkner himself stated in an interview with Jean Stein in 1956, "time is a fluid condition which has no existence except in the momentary avatars of individual people. There is no such thing as was — only is, if *was* existed there would be no grief or sorrow." His time therefore is a continuum as we see in the story. Time flows from the past into the present and from the present into the past. Reality is not so much objective experience but what past and present have made of an object or an event within a given set of psychological conditions. While Emily assumes the burden of the past in an obsessive way, the town demonstrates the same tendencies that are pushed to an insane extreme in Miss Emily. She denies (and the townspeople let her) the passing of the old order. They hear, as the Aldermen heard when they attempted to collect her taxes, "the invisible watch ticking at the end of the gold chain." In this story that passage of time remains invisible.

Appearing now and then in the downstairs windows in her house "like the carved torso of an idol in niche," Emily can neither escape nor reconcile herself to the fact that she inhabits a world of time and change. This we see in her refusal to accept the deaths of Colonel Sartoris, her father and Homer. She tries to cross the chasm between the immortal and the mortal, between life and death — to erect a bridge of flesh — and lives to see it literally crumble into dust.

Emily herself is arrested in time. Her fight to maintain the past is seen through her denial of death. Looking at the story not in chronological order but in the order in which we read it, we see Emily first denying the death of Colonel Sartoris, in



that she simply refuses to acknowledge that he is not available for consultation. When she refuses to let the doctors dispose of her father's body, the townspeople believed she had to do that because "we remembered all the young men her father had driven away and we knew that with nothing left she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will." Her third denial, or course, is in the case of Homer. Emily clings to tradition — the tradition of the fallen aristocracy. What has robbed her is the North on the one hand (represented here in Homer); the fall of the South, (obviously reliant upon the North); the old tradition that placed her in the role of nobility; and Homer himself, who has robbed her of her virginity.

Emily clings to the past not only in her refusal to give up her dead but in her appearance. After her father's death and her ensuing illness when she reappeared in the town again, "her hair was cut short making her look like a girl with a vague resemblance to those angels in colored church windows, sort of tragic and serene." She assumes the appearance of youth which she probably had at the time her father was driving away the suitors.

That she remains static against the passage of time is further exemplified in

description. She looked at one point in the story bloated — "like a body long submerged in motionless water" held motionless and static.

Unusual in literature is the form of interior monologue evident in this short story. The narrative voice is that of the collective consciousness of the town of Jefferson, Mississippi. The events in the story are all reported to be common knowledge of Jefferson as a whole. Interestingly enough, it would be unlikely that some of the information related as common knowledge by the town could have actually been known; for example, that there was a room in Emily's house which had been closed for forty years.

In what could well be considered an examination of the failure of language to recognize truth, we have information given which, like the general language in

this story, is subjective rather than representative of objective truth. For example, the townspeople, in thinking about Miss Emily when her father was still alive and her failure to marry, had "long thought of them as a tableau; Miss Emily a slender figure in white in the background, similar to an angel, her father a sprattled silhouette in the foreground, his back to her and clutching a horsewhip, the two of them framed by the back flung front door." Note that this is an impression by the townspeople, not stated as a reality. Similarly, the servant's voice is rusty "as if" from disuse — not necessarily from never speaking.

Noteworthy throughout the story is this subjective and flexible use of language. Unlike the ordinary use of prose, Faulkner's language here is evocative rather than the ordinary presentation of reality. We see this in phrases like "the cedar-bemused cemetery," "the thin swift clop-clop-clop of the matched team" [of horses] and the "tedious brushes" used in describing the paint brushes of the children who came for china painting lessons. The style used in describing Emily's house is evoked at the end of the story in a description of a dead Homer. The description of the house reads as follows: "it was a big squarish framed house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrawled balconies in the heavily light-some style of the 70's, set on what had once been our most select street." In this sentence the discrepancy between the

past, the past beauty of the house, and the past position of the street in the town is contrasted with the present. Following, we find out that "garages and cotton gins had encroached and obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood; only Miss Emily's house was left, lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons and the gasoline pumps — an eyesore among eyesores." That same contrasting and evoking language is used at the end of the story. Here in the description of Homer, again the relation between the past and the present is contrasted: "the body had apparently once lain in the attitude of embrace, but now the long sleep that outlasts love, that conquers even the grimace of love, had cuckolded him. What was left of him, rotted beneath what was left of the nightshirt, had become inextricable from the bed in which he lay; and upon him and upon the pillow beside him lay that even coating of the patient and biding dust."

The role of the Black, manifested to much greater extent in *The Sound and the Fury* and other stories and novels, is also demonstrated in "A Rose for Emily." For Faulkner, the Black represents an element of stability — that which endures. Usually it is the Black man or the Black woman who holds the White family together. Here we find out in the very first sentence that the only person of her immediate household who outlived Miss Emily was the old man-servant, the combined gardener and cook. It is he who goes in and out the back door with the market basket

year after year; it is he, however, who keeps her secret, who does not permit the townspeople to know she was ill at the point she was dying. They had given up trying to get any information from him. At the time of Emily's death when the ladies appear at the front door, the Negro met the first of the women and let them in, then he disappeared. "He walked right through the house and out the back and was not seen again." It is he that has prevailed intact in this story. It is he who escapes the weight of tradition which burdens not only Emily but the townspeople as well.

The question of the relation of the story to the title bears consideration in "A Rose for Emily." Emily herself receives no roses in the story although the townspeople bring her bought flowers at the funeral. (The significance of the bought flowers is that, contrary to the southern tradition of bringing cut flowers from their gardens to funerals, the townspeople purchased flowers for Emily.) She receives her accolades for the place she held in Jefferson, a social position as important to the town as a whole as we assume it was to her. But unlike the curious women, the old men — and Faulkner, too — pay their last respects to the fallen monument — the Old South — which Emily Grierson represents. The story may well represent the author's "rose" or tribute to the passing of the old order.

#### ENDNOTE

<sup>1</sup>Malcolm Cowley. *The Portable Faulkner*. New York: Viking Press, 1967, p. 390.



FOR A LONG TIME, the reading public was led to believe that Robert Frost's relationship with New England was rooted in a long association with that region, as a farmer and nature lover. Frost endorsed this view of himself as a "Yankee farmer poet" as John C. Kemp has recently shown in his book *Robert Frost and New England*. This belief is one which Frost himself helped to create, and which he cultivated assiduously early in his career. Kemp summarizes this image-building process as follows:

*Not content to let the British reviewers shape his reputation, Frost mounted a campaign in the summer and fall of 1913 to establish his identity as a Yankee farmer poet, in the region from which this identity was supposedly drawn. (148)*

Frost adopted this Yankee persona because it gave him a framework which he desired, and from which he could make his laconic, ironic observations. Such a persona also allowed him to develop statements about nature more believably. So well did he choose that the Yankee farmer-poet image stayed with him for half a century. This essay is a small sidestep of Kemp's larger question, i.e. just how much of this image was a deliberate fiction, into a parallel one: just what was gained by adopting this regional persona? I wish to demonstrate how Frost manipulates the irony used by his speakers in some sample poems. I think I can establish the fact that Frost makes use of irony as a rhetorical

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## Robert Frost: Yankee Ironist

device to press the advantage of his view of the world. If it was to some extent prefabricated Yankee posturing, so much the better.

Frost's irony is the immediate result of a dual-vision stance. The duality may be past/present, imagined/real, etc.; but it is most often a play of keen observation versus accepted beliefs, i.e. individualistic utterances. The effects which he achieves are, at their best, those of a speaking personality who is dramatized more by the strength and importance of his powers for observation than of the subjects on which they are employed. Furthermore, we find the Frostian persona is a tactful man, who often employs ironies and other indirect modes of address in order to avoid alienation of his audience.

Frost's irony gives him a technical resource with which to represent a given speaker's resourcefulness in converting experience into statement. The rhetoric of irony is of one piece with the speaker's postures and perceptions, and the resulting dramatic voice can be urbane or provincial, sophisticated or rustic, so long as it is basically true to that speaker's experience—and common-sensical. This rhetorical posture is not necessarily that of a real Yankee farmer—but literary tradition is certainly behind such an identification, and Frost took full advantage of that tradition, not to mention many others.

Consider, for example, that quintessential piece of regionalism—"New Hampshire." In it, the speaker gives us his true account of that state. Comic irony is frequently the method employed by the speaker to redefine most conventional attitudes to suit his own idiosyncratic way of looking at the state. In a long monologue, the speaker is a sort of raconteur, who knows very well that the entire value of the story lies in his handling of the telling. Expecting a narrative about usual praiseworthy attributes—resources, potentialities, unique features, products, scenery—one gets just that, but in quite an unexpected manner. New Hampshire, the speaker says, falls short in virtually all conventional assets save poetry: and for that, "Do you know,/Considering the market, there are more/ Poems produced than any other thing?" The usual expectations about land, trade, politics, history, geography, climate, etc. are simply not fulfilled. In fact, such topics are considered only to show that the state is deficient in them all, and that it is just not tuned in to the world of business and development. It is out of the main stream of the American tradition; and, ironically, that is its greatest attribute. New Hampshire's most valuable resource is its people, who are individualists of the speaker's persuasion. He produces only what he believes in—poems—just as they produce only what they believe in, and that not in commercial quantities:

The having anything to sell is what  
Is the disgrace in man or state or nation.

Such an obviously ironic reversal of all the usual expectations sets the tone for all of this long poem. He has strong convictions, as the term "disgrace" in the lines just quoted indicates. He takes a deliberately crochety posture, and avoids hyperbole in favor of ironic understatement when praise is called for. Aware of his own partisan prejudices, and the reader's, he persuades of the rightness of his position by the consistency with which he adheres to the persona of the stubborn individualist. He values individuality wherever he finds it, and he finds it in New Hampshire:

I hadn't an illusion in my handbag  
About the people being better there  
Than those I left behind. I thought they weren't  
I thought they couldn't be. And yet they were.

Instead of making his surprise explicit, with, say, an exclamation point, he presents his delight and astonishment in a customarily laconic key, ending with a mere period. The Yankee aversion to loquacity and hyperbole suits him perfectly.

The speaker approves of New Hampshire's people, for they are unsoiled by trade. Unlike those with upper-class pretensions, as the Southern lady in the first episode, the residents of his state are not in trade because the state offers little of commercial value. With characteristic understatement, the speaker blames them for not being miserable in their deprivation—at least for the sake of writing Russian novels in America. The ironic strategy is simple—praise by ironic blame. But it is particularly appropriate to this poem because it emphasizes the speaker's conscious self-delight with the possibilities of his ironic posture. He can make his peculiar views a source of delight and discovery for us, unlike the more straightforward patriotic bards.

The glorious bards of Massachusetts seem  
To want to make New Hampshire people over.  
They taunt the lofty land with little men.  
I don't know what to say about the people.  
For art's sake one could almost wish them worse  
Rather than better. How are we to write  
The Russian novel in America  
As long as life goes on so unutterably?  
There is the pinch from which our only outcry  
In literature to date is heard to come.  
We get what little misery we can  
Out of not having cause for misery.

And Massachusetts is put in its place before he is through; it lacks good individuals.

I'd sure had no such friends in Massachusetts  
As Hall of Windham, Gay of Atkinson,  
Bartlett of Raymond (now of Colorado),  
Hains of Derry, and Lynch of Bethlehem.

The approval that the speaker shows for individualists, even bizarre ones, is typified by his reaction to the farmer who burned down his house for the insurance,

And spent the proceeds on a telescope  
To satisfy a life-long curiosity  
About our place among the infinities.  
And how was that for other-worldliness?

Such a daring—and illegal—act is able to satisfy curiosity; and the speaker clearly signals, by direct address to the reader, that he would do the same. The agreement he actively solicits from the

reader is a special part of the persona which he has adopted, the tactful ironist who wishes to avoid alienation of his audience, even when he is speaking in approving tones of arson.

In the second part of "New Hampshire" the speaker prides himself on his appreciation of the topography almost as much as he did on his appreciation of the inhabitants. He shifts his posture a bit and becomes more expansive, more confiding; as when he reflects upon his appreciation for mountains:

The only fault I find with old New Hampshire  
Is that her mountains are not quite high enough.

What starts as dispraise becomes praise, of course. The reasons for his dislike become straw men, falling before our realization that he is being self-deprecatory. Of all the possible reasons for not being satisfied,

No, none of these has raised me to my throne  
Of intellectual dissatisfaction,  
But the sad accident of having seen  
Our actual mountains given in a map  
Of early times as twice the height they are—  
Ten thousand feet instead of only five—  
Which shows how sad an accident may be.

The whimsicality of such a viewpoint is presented ironically as the only possible one:

The more the sensiblist I am  
The more I seem to want my mountains wild.

The seriousness of the conclusion is a reversal of the flippancy of the preceding tone, and it really does persuade the reader that the speaker's observations are the true account, the most sensible attitudes to have—at least in New Hampshire. The ultimate ironic reversal is the celebrated conclusion. Just as we are forced to agree that the speaker's slightly skewed perceptions are indeed the right way of looking at the state, we come to the matter-of-fact final sentence: "At present I am living in Vermont." This is Frost's equivalent of Swift's speaker's protestation at the end of *A Modest Proposal* that he has nothing personal to gain, being childless. The speaker of "New Hampshire" has, himself, nothing to sell:

Well, if I have to choose...  
I choose to be a plain New Hampshire farmer  
With an income in cash of say a thousand  
(From say a publisher in New York City).  
It's restful to arrive at a decision,  
And restful just to think about New Hampshire.  
At present I am living in Vermont.

Not all the ironic statements are found in long poems of course. One of the finest short examples is "A Peck of Gold," which is similar to "New Hampshire" in that it punctures the pretensions of the Golden State, Frost's birthplace. Playing on the implied proverb "You must eat a peck of dirt before you die," Frost recalls that as a child he was told that the dust blowing about in pre-earthquake San Francisco was real gold:

And I was one of the children told  
Some of the blowing dust was gold.

The irony of course resides in the discrepancy with adult judgment, and the speaker clearly takes delight in adopting the dual-vision stance of the ironist, which allows full play for his critical sense. He judges his experiences, savors the contrast between then and now, and points to the incongruities. In short, he is discerning. Such an attitude, careful perception of

incongruity, is that of either the comedian or the ironist.

"Reluctance" is another poem which illustrates fine handling of irony. From the start, its theme is placed in the dramatic context of a speaker's apparently aimless wandering. Winter is coming, and he is reluctant to accept the fact. But in context, what is a negative attitude—reluctance—is, ironically, the highest form of affirmation. The speaker's presentation of this is in the form of rhetorical question, with its intentional emphasis of quasiaffirmative syntax:

Ah, when to the heart of man  
Was it ever less than treason  
To go along with the drift of things,  
To yield with a grace to reason,  
And bow and accept the end  
Of a love or a season?

The deliberate delay of the question mark to the very end of the stanza is a syntactical dramatization for the speaker's reluctance to come to the end. The irony is pervasive, for his resistance to the inevitable, though he knows resistance is futile, is cast in affirmative rhetoric; it resists with words what he cannot resist in act. It is as if he is saying "what I cannot effect in reality I shall effect in syntax."

The irony perceived in "Reluctance" has a counterpart in "Acceptance." There, the speaker observes that birds do not complain about the end of a day. Nature anticipates change, and, forearmed, its creatures can act accordingly without troubling themselves with implications.

Murmuring something quiet in her breast,  
One bird begins to close a faded eye;  
Or overtaken too far from his nest,  
Hurrying low above the grove, some waif  
Swoops just in time to his remembered tree.  
At most he thinks or twitters softly, 'Safe!  
Now let the night be dark for all of me.  
Let the night be too dark for me to see  
Into the future. Let what will be, be.

Frost's stature as a "nature poet" should be measured against such a poem as this. There is sympathy for the bird (a "waif") only insofar as human feelings are not projected onto it too heavily. When it begins to have no fears about "the future" then we are dealing with ironic personification, i.e. with human beings. Frost is making an ironic statement about human behavior, under cover of birdwatching. Limited, selfish, or hubristic attitudes toward Nature are being satirized. Only a limited understanding can say "Let what will be, be."

The sort of proprietary attitude toward Nature shown by the protagonist in "The Most of It" comes in for ironic treatment also. So alone does the man find himself in the universe that "He thought he kept the universe alone."

For all the voice in answer he could wake  
Was but the mocking echo of his own  
From some tree-hidden cliff across the lake.

We see that situation ironically, as does the speaker, who observes and understands such solitary figures as the one in the poem who "would cry out on life, that what it wants/Is not its own love back in copy speech,/But counter-love, original response." The most that ever came in response to such a cry to Nature was, observes the speaker dryly, a great buck that forged through the water and went crashing away through the

underbrush. The poem is a slightly comic ironic parody of the Romantic view of Nature. Nature has no knowledge of man, and, therefore, no sympathy. It simply surprises him from time to time. Frost has narrated an instance wherein one man was surprised to find, as the speaker is quite aware, that there is nothing human out there.

"One Step Backward Taken" is another recollected statement of apperception, opening with the speaker's narration of a landslide loosed by a violent storm. Although there is no stanzaic division in the poem, there is a break in rhyme scheme, which is in couplets for the first half, and in alternating lines in the second. Both types of rhymes make use of comic near-rhymes such as "balance" and "gallons" in the first half. They are also united by the jaunty, self-deprecatory tone of the speaker. The onslaught of sand, gravel, stones, and boulders—even "capes"—is recalled with the amusement of one who knows his own insignificance. He was undermined in what seemed a "universal crisis."

I felt my standpoint shaken  
In the universal crisis,  
But with one step backward taken  
I saved myself from going.  
A world torn loose went by me.  
Then the rain stopped and the blowing.  
And the sun came out to dry me. (*punctuation mine*).

The opposition between a "universal crisis" and a small local landslide is deeply and ironically felt. "Crisis" is a term that should be reserved for human affairs. The tone throughout is the casual, self-deprecatory irony of which so much of Frost's lyric partakes. He can casually avoid "a world torn loose" and congratulate himself on his sagacity by assuming that the sun took a personal interest in his welfare; but he does not believe that, and neither do we. His attitude toward himself is not that of a Yankee moralist, but of a deeply ironic thinker, using understatement of his own importance or ironic overstatement of it to the ends—to convince us that his is the sane, balanced, valuable view of the world, not at all provincial, not at all businesslike, not at all New England. Not California either, I must add, with "A Peck of Gold" in mind. Frost's so-called Yankee voice is not from the soil; he never expects any answers from Nature, and she never disappoints him. Even when she seems to be vindictive or threatening, he sees that there is nothing out there. In "Thrush Music" he would like to feel that he is being invited into the woods,

Almost like a call to come in  
To the dark and lament.

That sort of thinking always triggers resolute rejection;  
I would not come in.  
I meant not even if asked,  
And I hadn't been.

One feels that even Keatsian nightingales would not tempt him for a minute.

No, the Yankee farmer was a persona; useful for getting inside a region like New Hampshire, even if on idiosyncratic bases. The real Frost was always aware of "an income in cash of say a thousand/From say a publisher in New York City."

My title, then, becomes an ironic rhetorical question: "Robert Frost: Yankee Ironist?" ■

## Shipping Out with Ishmael: An Approach to Teaching *Moby Dick*

IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "The Opening Three Chapters of *The Great Gatsby*," Robert Emmet Long writes that "One of the effective methods of teaching a novel . . . is to give close attention to the introduction."<sup>1</sup> I share this opinion and think many readers of *The English Record* would place Melville's *Moby Dick* among those works which can be effectively introduced to undergraduates by combining Long's method of concentrated study of the opening chapters with Richard Freed's approach to Whitman through a brief lecture.<sup>2</sup> This article exemplifies that combined approach.

The teacher who has wrestled with the almost unmanageable abundance of *Moby Dick* in order to present it to undergraduates may have found that students are puzzled by the role of Ishmael. Is he the central character or is Ahab? For sixteen chapters Ishmael enjoys the limelight. Thereafter his story is eclipsed by Ahab's. Did Melville have a reason for devoting the introductory pages to Ishmael? Critics of *Moby Dick* have yet to offer a unified appraisal of the first sixteen chapters, yet these chapters stand as a unit in terms of action, setting, imagery, and symbolism.<sup>3</sup> They are essential to Melville's purpose of establishing the character and reliability of his narrator.

At the beginning of *Moby Dick*, Ishmael is young and rebellious, impatient with conformity and idle dreaming, but paradoxically stodgy, provincial, and conforming. Can we trust his judgment? Is the young man who hesitates to share a harpooner's bed because the linen may be soiled, who overconfidently expects a greater share of the *Pequod's* profits than Peleg and Bildad will grant him, who impertinently asks to see the captain before going to sea, a sufficiently sophisticated narrator to present the tragedy of Ahab? Because Melville knew that his narrator must be accepted as a dependable judge of the hero, he devoted sixteen chapters to establishing Ishmael's character. In nautical terms, Melville permits us to examine Ishmael's shipping papers.

### I

#### The Discontented Landsman

With light-hearted misanthropy, Ishmael views the vaguely yearning Sunday crowds that line the waterfronts of Manhattan.

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They indulge their ocean reveries from a secure land base. Ishmael feels an urge to knock the hats off these staid citizens—a "damp, drizzly November"<sup>4</sup> oppresses his spirit and he thinks of suicide. But there is a substitute for violence to self or fellow man: a whaling voyage—the chance to ease the "everlasting itch for things remote . . . to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts" (p. 16). With these incentives, Ishmael is launched on his adventure.

Firm land. What fitter symbol of social and spiritual orthodoxy can there be than the land? In an atmosphere of stability and safety, such as solid land affords, flexible opinion hardens into the rigid orthodoxy of civilization. And if land may express orthodoxy, may not the mutable, danger-fraught ocean symbolize the reverse? Ishmael's progress from Manhattan to the outbound *Pequod* reveals a parallel development between his character and the settings through which he passes—a development from a smug, overconfident, narrow-minded landsman to a partially chastened, open-minded, tolerant sailor.

### II

#### Transition State: The Spouter Inn

The vast transition from land to sea is best accomplished gradually. We first accompany Ishmael to New Bedford, as close to the ocean as we can get while still holding to the mainland. Here Ishmael stays two nights and a day before embarking for Nantucket Island. Seeking lodging, Ishmael blunders into a church which resembles "the great Black Parliament sitting in Tophet. A hundred black faces turned round in their rows to peer; and beyond, a black Angel of Doom was beating a book in a pulpit. It was a negro church; and the preacher's text was about the blackness of darkness" (p. 18). The humor of this picture at first obscures Ishmael's amused superiority. Two things could account for his reaction: the fact that he is in church; the fact that he is in a negro church. Is Ishmael laughing at religion in general? The tone is absent during Father Mapple's sermon. When we consider the second possibility, we find that while Melville has made it impossible for the reader and Ishmael not to be amused

by the excessive blackness of the scene, he has also revealed Ishmael responding automatically to the blackness of the preacher and his flock. In contrast, by the time he boards the *Pequod*, he finds nothing absurd in black Daggoo. When he sails from Nantucket, he has cast aside the habit of judging by stereotypes and outward appearances. Melville carefully accounts for this alteration in his narrator.

Ishmael lodges at the Spouter Inn, which signifies both land and sea; for while it is a land dwelling, the "low, straggling entry" reminds Ishmael "of the bulwarks of some condemned old craft" (p. 20), and in the public room "you would almost fancy you trod some old craft's cockpits, especially of such a howling night, when his corner-anchored old ark rocked so furiously" (p. 21). A seascape depicts a whale impaling himself on the masts of a ship, harpoons ornament the walls, and the whale jaw framing the bar intensifies the ocean atmosphere of the inn. But New Bedford is still on the mainland, as the menu of meat, potatoes, and dumplings attests.

In this mingled atmosphere of land and sea, civilized orthodoxy in Presbyterian Ishmael meets primitive superstition in heathen Queequeg. In a sense, this is a more intimate repetition of the scene in the black church. When Ishmael hesitantly agrees to "put up with the half of any decent man's blanket" (p. 22), his roster of decent men includes neither unwashed harpooners nor head-peddling pagans; indeed, dauntless Ishmael soon repents his decision: "I abominated the thought of sleeping with him. It was fair to presume that . . . his linens . . . would not be of the tidiest" (p. 24). But necessity prevails. Better to sleep two in a bed than ache all night on a bench, Ishmael decides. Learning, however, that his bedfellow is out trying to sell his head, Ishmael cautions Peter Coffin that if the harpooner turns out to be a madman, the landlord will be "liable to a criminal prosecution" (p. 26). While Ishmael's threat is half in jest, the warning is what we would expect from a conventional landsman. At sea, Ishmael will encounter a different law—the unconventional law of Ahab's will—no courts, no fines, no "criminal prosecutions."

Ishmael's first view of Queequeg convinces him that all is not as it should be. In the dim light he discerns strange tattooings, which remind him of "a story of white man—a whaleman too—who, falling among the cannibals, had been tattooed by them" (p. 29). The significance of Ishmael's remark is his effort to explain the tattooing in a manner acceptable to a civilized Christian. That he should sleep with a white Christian tattooed against his will is a thought easier to live with than that of sleeping with a voluntarily tattooed cannibal. When it becomes plain that the figure in the gloom "must be some abominable savage or other shipped aboard of a whaleman in the South Seas" Ishmael is horrified (pp. 29-30). He unhesitatingly associates that which is savage and abominable (and, of course, unorthodox) with things far-off and unknown, further evidence of his naivete'. Although his first contact with Queequeg almost ends with violence, after the turmoil of adjustment, Ishmael decides it is better to "sleep with a sober cannibal than a drunken Christian" (p. 31). Orthodoxy and conventional prejudice are yielding to tolerance and common sense. It may not be to Ishmael's taste to sleep with a heathen, but he seems to be taking to heart the advice of Peter Coffin: "I s'pose you are goin' a whalin', so you'd better get used to that sort of thing" (p. 22).

Despite exposure to such peculiarities as Queequeg's sleeping with his tomahawk and putting on his boots under the bed, Ishmael remarks that cannibals, Feejeeans, and other "outlandish" persons are less comical and curious than hayseeds from New Hampshire and Vermont (p. 37). *Outlandish* is a happy choice of words, for to the orthodox landsman, cannibals and Feejeeans are not only uncouth, but are literally from outside the *land*—from islands in the sea. Through this wordplay, Melville equates outlandishness with unorthodoxy. And this view is still held by a part of the narrator, who views cannibal and country bumpkin with equal smugness. At this point, Ishmael is portrayed as a man in the state of changing beliefs. He is catching glimpses of light, and his former beliefs are shaded with skepticism. Neither a steadfast Christian nor a pagan, more than anything he is an observer.

In this moral and philosophical state, he enters the Whaleman's Chapel. Like the Spouter Inn, the chapel is on solid land, but inside one would hardly believe it. The pulpit, shaped like a ship's prow, is ascended to by a side ladder. Behind it is a picture of a storm-tossed ship, but unlike the doomed vessel portrayed at the Spouter Inn, angelic light beams upon this craft, promising safety and serenity to come. The promise is clouded by irony, however, for on the walls epitaphs recount men lost at sea. And despite Father Mapple's dramatization of the Book of Jonah, that admonition to perseverance in orthodox faith and obedience, the promise of salvation by God is belied by those portentous plaques.

Ishmael makes no comment on his reaction to the sermon, but if we follow him back to the Spouter Inn, keeping Father Mapple's text in mind, comparisons between Jonah-like Judeo-Christianity and Queequeg-like paganism become apparent. When Ishmael enters his room, Queequeg is whittling on a black idol; shortly afterwards he begins to count the pages of a book. Since as much importance is given to one action as to the other, it is possible to see symbolic evaluation of the work of civilization (the book) and the work of paganism (the idol) in the juxtaposition of these actions.<sup>5</sup> An equipoise results. The scene is set for a choice, and what follows is for Ishmael a vital decision: he will renounce civilized orthodoxy for a pagan friend.

The reasoning which leads to this decision can be traced. While the harpooner is occupied with the idol and the book, Ishmael contemplates Queequeg's face and reflects that appearances cannot hide the soul:

Through all his unearthly tattooings, I thought I saw the traces of a simple honest heart . . . And besides . . . there was a certain lofty bearing about the Pagan, which even his uncouthness could not altogether maim. He looked like a man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor. (p. 52)

"A man who had never cringed and never had had a creditor" recalls Jonah's terrified flight from an obligation and abject repentance in the belly of the fish. What is this but a reversal of Queequeg's virtues? In this juxtaposition of Christian and pagan virtues, Ishmael sees nobility in Queequeg, likening the harpooner's shaven head to busts of George Washington, symbol of civilized aristocracy. Queequeg's ease, serenity, and dignity have a winning influence on Ishmael: "No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it" (p. 53).

Redeemed? Redemption of a Christian soul was the office of Father Mapple, but after his sermon we heard nothing from Ishmael about redemption. Weary of empty rituals associated with civilization, Ishmael finds consolation in a pagan nature "in which there lurked no civilized hypocrisies and bland deceits." He chooses a pagan friend "since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy" (p. 53).

Queequeg attended Father Mapple's sermon. In their room, he makes known that now he wants Ishmael to worship the black idol. Ishmael's break with orthodoxy is sealed when he speciously uses the Golden Rule to justify idolatry:

[W]hat is worship?—to do the will of God—that is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man do to me—that is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. (p. 54)

The symbolic bridal night of Ishmael and Queequeg affirms the marriage of nominal enemies (Christian and heathen) in the commonality of mankind. It is also, fittingly, the last night in New Bedford. A stage of Ishmael's transition is complete; in the morning he is off to brinier surroundings.

### III

#### Pagans and Christians

After their "hearts' honeymoon," Ishmael learns about Queequeg's past and widens his perspective through the pagan's wisdom. The story of Queequeg's daring and determination in boarding the ship which took him to see Christendom is the counterpart of Ishmael's desire to "sail forbidden seas and land on barbarous coasts" (p. 16). Courage and adventuresome spirit are common to Christian and pagan.

Something else shared by all men is fallibility. When Queequeg tells of his mistake with the wheelbarrow, Ishmael's response is innocently provincial: " 'Why,' said I, 'Queequeg, you might have known better than that, one would think. Didn't the people laugh?' " (p. 59) Queequeg answers by relating the foible of a Christian among the Polynesians: when the ship's captain washed his hands in the ceremonial punchbowl, doesn't Ishmael suppose Queequeg's people laughed? Thus, Ishmael gains insight into the relative nature of propriety, and learns a lesson in tolerance of human error.

Enroute to Nantucket, Queequeg saves the packet when the Christian captain is impotent in the emergency. But the most convincing proof of the superiority of an able and virtuous pagan to helpless and self-righteous Christians is Queequeg's heroic rescue of the bumpkin who ridiculed him, a rescue he effects before the crew can clear away a boat. Queequeg does not exult in his superiority; rather, Ishmael tells us, "[he] seemed to be saying to himself—'It's a mutual, joint-stock world, in all meridians. We cannibals must help these Christians' " (p. 61). The effect of Queequeg's tolerant wisdom is to submerge in the ocean of humanity the distinction between pagan and Christian. We have, therefore, a reaffirmation, and an extension to a general principle, of the marriage of Ishmael and Queequeg.

The gradual change in Ishmael's attitude has been accompanied by a shift of scenes progressively nearer the sea: in

chapter one, Ishmael talks about the yearning of the landsman for stream, lake, and ocean; early in chapter two he arrives in Bedford, which, though still part of the mainland, is a seaport. Here he stays at the Spouter Inn, a mixture of land and sea, with its meat and potatoes, and its whale-jaw bar. At the Whaleman's Chapel sea imagery predominates: the pulpit like a ship's prow; the picture of the wave-tossed ship; the sermon from the Book of Jonah. Then, the short crossing to Nantucket brings Ishmael to the verge of the sea itself.

### IV

#### Transition State: Nantucket

Nantucket Island. We can come no closer to the sea and still feel earth beneath our feet. It stands "away off shore, more lonely than the Eddystone lighthouse" (p. 61). The Nantucketer alone "resides and riots on the sea; he alone . . . goes down to it in ships" (p. 63). Despite its landsman's fare, the atmosphere of the Spouter Inn smacked strongly of the sea, but if the Spouter was a salty inn,

[f]ishiest of all fishy places was the Try Pots, which well deserved its name; for the pots there were always boiling chowders. Chowder for breakfast, chowder for dinner and chowder for supper, till you began to look for fish-bones coming through your clothes. (p. 65)

Here at Nantucket, Ishmael spends his last days ashore. While the *Pequod* receives her lading and fitting-out, Ishmael, like the ship, is squared-away by Captains Peleg and Bildad. For, although friendship with Queequeg has broadened Ishmael, it is still a cocky and confident greenhorn who offhandedly tells Captain Peleg that he is "thinking of shipping" (p. 68). Peleg deflates Ishmael with scornful references to the "marchant service" (pp. 68-69), while Bildad adds injury to insult by offering him the seven hundred and seventy-seventh lay.

As Ishmael is leaving, he informs Peleg that he wants to see Captain Ahab, and Peleg puts him in his place:

And what dost thou want of Captain Ahab? It's all right enough; thou art shipped."

"Yes, but I should like to see him."

"But I don't think thou wilt be able to at present. . . . Any how, young man, he won't always see me, so I don't suppose he will thee." (p. 76)

Youth has experienced a setback when our narrator fails to impose a single condition upon his enlistment. Here aboard the *Pequod* Ishmael signs his shipping papers, effecting his transition from landsman to sailor. The setting is appropriate, for the ship is joined to land by mooring lines—ties that will soon be cast off.

### V

#### The Sea

By the time the *Pequod* has put to sea, Ishmael is wiser than when he started for New Bedford. As he has drawn farther from the mainland, much narrowness has disappeared. He has cast off foolish prejudices and taken to his heart a virtuous pagan, while his over-confidence has been harpooned by Captain Peleg. The last vestiges of the orthodox mainland slide away from the *Pequod* at the departure of Peleg and Bildad. Starbuck remains, but ineffectual orthodoxy is almost the same as no orthodoxy at

(Continued on page 12)

# SERENDIPITY

## Using Games to Review Literature

William J. Boerst

THIS YEAR I STOOD formally before my high-school English class and addressed that sea of faces: "Now that you are no longer children, it is time to put away childish things." Immediately the Rubic's cubes disappeared from view, but students continued to use them underground.

Since apparently that phoenix bird was going to reappear, how could I add gaming fever to my bag of tricks? How might I supplement the regular read-discuss-test syndrome with summation devices that would refresh and challenge my students? It seemed the only way I had viewed closure was through objective and essay tests. Maybe there were some other routes.

I was aware that people love trivia when the solution to a puzzle is at stake, and I even knew some crossword-puzzle addicts. Starting with this idea, I used two text units as the territory for a scavenger hunt. I randomly listed people, places, properties, and ideas from our selections. For each item on the list, students were to write the selection title and the item's characteristics and role.

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One item, from "To the Chicago Abyss" by Ray Bradbury, was "Brazilian beans, fresh ground!" The students had to identify the story and explain that this was part of an announcement by the old man who couldn't resist postwar commercializing. From the same story I pulled *Card, Joseph, and Ticket*. Students really enjoyed pointing out to me that there was also a Joseph in one of our other stories. I defended myself admirably by calling my accusers nit-pickers and trivia-mongers.

Some students paid me the supreme compliment by complaining, "We have to reread every story to find these things." They were really skim-reading, a very handy research skill to develop.

Once we finished the scavenger hunt sheets, we moved on to bigger and better trivia — student-generated crossword puzzles. I gave each student a paper with a grid on the upper two-thirds of the page and the words *Across* and *Down* on the lower third. They were to place an answer key in the grid and provide clues for a possible crossword puzzle of five items down and five items across. I encouraged the use of texts and scavenger hunt sheets.

Before they tackled the task, I advised them to use only one-word grid entries to avoid con-

fusion. I also gave a quick lesson in providing clues that are neither too difficult nor too easy.

Students became challenging puzzle makers in a hurry. One student's clue for HAYWARD, the unsuccessful psychiatrist in Robert Heinlein's "They," was just a quote: "Now that you are a man, you must see the adult point of view." Another student referred to Hayward's chess game with the hint *Could not get beyond stalemate*.

Once I had all these puzzle answer-keys, I made some actual crossword puzzles using student items. (Naturally I included credits for student contributions.) In the process, I could clear up ambiguities and correct mistakes that might hinder solutions. The final act was to have students solve these composite crossword puzzles.

I should explain that this was not an

evaluative technique. I already had a quiz average and analytical essays for that. This activity was kept informal and non-threatening. Instead of my picking the students' brains, they picked their own by challenging fellow students. Along the way, they recalled selections, skim-read for specific details, and corrected misspellings. One result was that they ended up with a better idea of our unit contents. I hope another result was that they re-enjoyed some of the selections through a different approach. Based on their powers of concentration during the tasks, I can affirm that they found the activities challenging and enjoyable.

Trivia? Yes, a lot of it. But trivia was not used to destroy reading enjoyment and establish the irrelevance of literature. This was trivia for trivia's sake. The more the merrier.

Of course, there was the token killjoy

who argued, "What's with the little-kid stuff?" I decided to forget my lecture on the value of medium transfer. Instead, I countered with a mock seriousness that held him at bay. Such an approach has worked well other times in the past. Once, when I asked juniors and seniors to make four-frame cartoons of their favorite selections, I observed, "I give sophomores crayons, but you don't need them." During that same session one student asked whether this was an art class. I answered, "Why, yes. Did you think you had signed up for a literature elective?"

Fun and games may not be the only answer. But using games to review literature seems to work. I can at least claim that the Rubic's cubes not only disappeared from view during scavenger hunts and crossword puzzles; they disappeared from the underground. ■

## Shipping Out with Ishmael (continued from page 10)

all—and Starbuck is not only powerless to save the *Pequod*, he cannot even save himself.

Ishmael's education is incomplete. He has scorned the warning of Elijah, and can still say of himself:

Not ignoring what is good, I am quick to perceive a horror, and could still be social with it—would they let me—since it is but well to be on friendly terms with all the inmates of the place one lodges in. (p. 16)

In the course of the voyage, Ishmael will learn that there are evils in the world with which to live on friendly terms is to risk having one's soul dragged down to destruction. Yet incomplete though his education may be before exposure to the *Voyage of Life* under Ahab, it is a sound one, founded on tolerance, humility, good humor, common sense, and brotherly love. These virtues may not be sufficient to qualify him for Christian sainthood, but they are enough to mark him as among the redeemable members of flawed humanity. They are enough to explain why he alone is discovered alive by the *Rachel*. They are also enough to explain why it is through his eyes that the story is told of a captain whose tragic ruin results in part from the absence or denial in himself of those qualities that are the cornerstone of Ishmael's character.

### VI

#### Debarkation: A Final Word to the Teacher

The purpose of our study has not been to dive deeply into symbolism and ambiguities which are likely to overwhelm the student making his acquaintance with *Moby-Dick*. Indeed, the opening lecture should aim for a level at which the sunlight of the literal narrative can be plainly perceived. One assumes at one's peril that students can accurately comprehend even the surface of a book as vast and subtle as *Moby-Dick*. This is why it is

valuable to provide a guided, orderly introduction to some of the major ideas in Melville's book rather than casting the student all at once, like the unfortunate Pip, into myriad wonders of the deep. When gradual immersion has been achieved, the teacher can initiate his class into the mysteries to be found at "the little lower layer."

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>*The English Record*, 26 (Fall, 1975), 85-94. The passage is on p. 85.

<sup>2</sup>"Teaching Whitman to College Freshmen," *The English Record*, 29 (Winter, 1978), 9-12.

<sup>3</sup>Much has been written on Ishmael, of course. A notable example is W.B. Dillingham's "The Narrator of *Moby Dick*," *English Studies*, 49 (February, 1968), 20-29.

<sup>4</sup>Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*, or *The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), p. 12. Subsequent page references are included in the text.

<sup>5</sup>Despite Melville's sly refusal to identify the book, the emphasis on religion in chapters seven through ten leads the reader to safely conclude that it is the Bible. ■

## Reading the Writing of John McPhee:

### Bringing Archdruids, Oranges, and Energy to the Classroom

WHEN DO ENGLISH teachers use the term "non-fiction"? Probably to explain the Dewey Decimal system when they teach the library unit or to suggest reading materials for a team taught research unit with the history or social science teacher. That's when I did. Short stories had been my favorite reading in college literature classes, so I assumed this form would interest even my reluctant high school readers. It didn't. Then I began to think about how my own reading interests had been changing.

I began subscribing to the *New Yorker* in early 60's because I knew that I would have one, maybe two, short stories to read per week. In May of 1966 I was enjoying ads for elephant hide belts, "That's Too Bad Department," and Charles Adams' cartoons before settling down to some serious reading when a title, "Oranges," caught my eye. I read with uninterrupted interest until I was disappointed by the polite note at the end announcing that this was the first of a two-part article. There was the author's name, John McPhee. Later, thinking about what "Oranges" had contained, I realized I had been reading non-fiction.

What was it about that first McPhee article that held my interest and modified my short-story-reading addiction? McPhee recounted the intrigues of early orange pioneers among whose ranks were Harriet Beecher Stowe and her husband. He explained how the term "Indian River Oranges" became synonymous with a gourmet citrus delicacy, but later was used deceptively by advertisers. On-the-spot interviews with 60's citrus growers and county agents helped me picture the narrow dirt roads winding through the forests of orange trees and ten-inch

laceless boots worn as protection against rattlesnakes' fangs. After reading McPhee's combination of narrative, conversation, and description about oranges, I never looked at, bought, or ate an orange without thinking of "Oranges." (In hardback, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967).

John McPhee's name was now on my authors-to-be-read list along with Mary McCarthy and Flannery O'Connor. Later, browsing in a New Jersey paperback store, I found and bought a copy of one of McPhee's early paperbacks entitled *Pine Barrens* (New York: Farrar, 1968). He reported on an island of pines, a twentieth century wilderness on one side bordered by the smoke and industry of Philadelphia and on the other by the splintery boardwalks and umbrella-filled beaches of New Jersey coast. I also discovered I had driven past the ripening wild blueberries, quiet cranberry bogs, and some of the largest sections of sparsely populated land in the east without realizing it. McPhee not only describes the history of the area but he introduces Fred Brown, area patriarch, who becomes part tour guide, part philosopher-historian giving the reader another viewpoint.

In the late 60's and early 70's, I noticed more of McPhee's writings in the *New Yorker*. Instead of skimming cartoons and ads first, I searched the table of contents for McPhee's name. "Levels of the Game," which appeared in June 7, 1969 issue, was about the careers of tennis players Arthur Ashe and Clark Graebner (New York: Farrar, 1969). Normally I was not a reader of sports articles, but the narrative of Ashe's and Graebner's climbs to the top ranks in tennis reminded me of a good mystery. I read to find out the outcome not only of the game but the lives of each player.

I began talking to my high school students about the tennis playing of Ashe

and Graebner and showing them parts of the McPhee article. Some asked to borrow my collection of McPhee articles and paperbacks. "We never had to read anything like this in school," was the most common response I got from the borrowers. I realized most of the students' reading had been literature in English classes and the fact-packed texts of science and history. I knew from experience as the high school newspaper sponsor that student news writing became a painful recitation: "He was born in... and his favorite hobbies are..." No matter who was being interviewed, they all sounded alike.

I introduced my classes to the writing of John McPhee starting with a sports article entitled, "A Sense of Where You Are," a profile of Bill Bradley, Princeton basketball player (New York: Farrar, 1965). I read excerpts to the class. I asked them to listen and remember details about description, dialogue, and statistics. We discussed questions — how did Bradley become a good basketball player? What's the difference between an amateur and a professional athlete? Why did McPhee give the Bradley profile the title he did? Was Bradley a hero? The last question became a point of comparison/contrast for other people interviewed and profiled by McPhee. I left the *New Yorker* on the classroom reading table, and students began to read the McPhee articles and "Talk of the Town," poetry, and short stories.

McPhee's range of topics during the 60's and 70's continued to be varied. The places he wrote about ranged from Scotland in the "Island Crofter and the Laird" (New York: Farrar, 1970) to Georgia in "Travels in Georgia" (New York: Farrar, 1970 in *Pieces of the Frame*). He introduced his reader to a variety of professions such as an art collector in "A

(Continued on p. 23)

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## A Structured Format for Writing about Literature

WRITING ABOUT LITERATURE is a challenging task for many students, because of both their insecurities about writing critical papers and their individual composition problems. Such problems are only compounded for students writing about literature in a second language. Out of our experiences with both groups, encountered in a variety of American and Japanese college classrooms, we have designed a structured procedure for helping students write successfully about literature.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, since designing the original structure for a composition course focusing on "Writing About Literature," we have adapted it to several kinds of courses and writing assignments.

Originally we were concerned with helping students understand better how critics write about literature, so they in turn could perform critical analysis. To accomplish this, we used a two-part structure:

- (1) close study of a selected short story
- (2) a "Checklist for Writing Critical Papers"

There are several good "teaching" stories available for such a purpose, but Klein had considerable success using Stephen Crane's "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." Along with close reading and discussion of the story, students used a summary of essential literary terms from Lynn Attenbernd and Leslie Lewis's *A Handbook of Literature*, still one of the most useful introductory reviews of critical terminology in literature. Once students completed this intensive study, we then moved to the "Checklist."

The "Checklist" consisted of two parts: brief models of different kinds of literary analysis and a general procedural guide. The models were carefully selected first paragraphs from seven different articles about literary works and covered a range of critical analyses: (1) structural and thematic study (2) genre study (3) thematic analysis (4) textual study of imagery (5) textual study of revisions (6) biographical study and (7) narrative technique. By having those brief introductory models available, we were able to discuss different kinds of literary analysis and work with excellent models of introductory paragraphs.

Since they are intended for use as handouts, most of this

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article consists of the basic "Checklist" (next page) and four of the seven original models. (See following pages for examples.)

After students examined the sample passages in class, they then turned to a two-part assignment for practice. Each student selected a story to work with, usually an old favorite. The first assignment was to determine a form of analysis, then write an introductory paragraph. When they were completed, we copied all the submitted examples, so students could see their own examples and discuss methods of improving upon the introductions they had written. The next part of the assignment was to actually write the full paper, which also was copied for classroom discussion after submission. So that students would follow up on the Introductory Checklist, we established briefer reminders for the Body and Conclusion of their papers, supplemented by in-class discussion of literary analysis and on-going discussions of composition style.

By the end of this process, students had gained some ability to analyze forms of literary criticism and had practiced writing criticism using one of the models presented to them. Our method made no attempt to present all the possible forms which students could imitate, but it did present concrete models as an aid to composition. And while this structure is obviously directed towards writing about literature, it is readily adaptable. In courses focusing on literature, any story may be substituted. In courses not about literature, the model can be altered to suit research papers on a variety of topics.<sup>2</sup> In our experience, the use of these models for writing about literature has proved to be a successful technique in the classroom.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The authors served separately as the Visiting Professor of English at the same provincial national Japanese university (Field, 1977-78; Klein, 1978-79). English majors there, at Shimane University, had little experience in writing in English, although beginning in 1977 each English major was required to write a 40-60 page senior thesis in English on a literary topic. The "Writing About Literature" segment discussed in this article was a part of a larger *Foreign Teacher's Composition Book* which was published in Spring 1979 by Shimane University (Matsue, Japan).

<sup>2</sup>Here is one such adaptation which Klein designed for an interdisciplinary course in the College of Engineering on the social impact of science and technology: In order to keep yourself on track while writing and to keep your reader clearly informed about your purpose and how you will meet that purpose, make a CONTRACT with the reader on the first page. Be sure to include the following on the first page:

- 1) statement of topic—what it is that you are investigating
- 2) statement of problem—why the topic is important (its moral/ethical/technological significance)
- 3) statement of method—how you've gone about your investigation (sources, goals, any limitations)
- 4) any qualifying remarks—any special expectations the reader should have or points which will not be covered.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE

When you are asked to write an analysis of a short story or a novel, you should use the skills of critical analysis. Here are two guides:

- (1) A Checklist of points to remember
- (2) Definitions of Different Kinds of Literary Analysis

### A CHECKLIST FOR WRITING CRITICAL PAPERS:

Critical papers analyze and explain an important point about literary work. They do not repeat the plot. The following items will help you organize and plan your paper. You do not need to include every one of these items in every paper you write, but you should select the ones which are most necessary for your topic.

**INTRODUCTION:** Write a draft of the introduction before you begin to write the paper, then be sure to revise or correct it after you have put the entire paper together.

**Statement of topic:** Be sure to name the work and its author early in the first part of the paper.

**Statement of interest:** Explain the point which interests you. Make your reader think you are interested in the work; if you seem bored with it, the reader will be too.

**Statement of problem:** What critical disagreement, textual problem or problem with interpretation of theme or character seems to be a problem or a difficult issue in this work? This should be a point which comes from your area of interest in the work.

**Your Way to Solve the Problem:** How will your paper try to solve that problem or analyze a difficult point?

Any of the following methods are useful:

- analysis of theme
- close textual analysis
- sociological, psychological or historical context
- survey of other critical opinions
- analysis of images or figurative language
- analysis of structure
- analysis of character
- interpretation of lines

**Statement of Thesis:** What is the main point your paper will illustrate and/or explain? Give one clear statement, preferably in one sentence.

**Forecast of organization:** In longer papers, especially, give the reader a map, a guide to the organization you will follow. If you will examine three important passages in the work, say so.

**BODY OF THE PAPER:** All paragraphs, sections and chapters must work toward a solution to the problem you have stated and support your thesis.

**Support for your argument:** Be sure every paragraph has a unified topic which helps develop your argument.

—Use specific quotes and illustrations from the work you are discussing.

—Analyze characters carefully:

- what they do                      what they say
- how others treat them              what others say about them
- what the narrator says about them

—Isolate main issues and find words that justify your emphasis on those points.

—Provide close readings, textual analysis.

Use vivid verbs, ones which give a sense of sight, sound, activity.

—Avoid the passive voice.

—Quote or summarize and *footnote* important critics who help support your thesis.

—Answer critics who argue against your thesis.

—Use your best arguments and strongest examples *last*.

**CONCLUSION:** For a longer paper, the conclusion should review the argument which you have pursued and restate the thesis. Highlight the importance of your argument.

Leave your reader feeling satisfied that you know the material, discussed it fairly, and argued your thesis convincingly.

Never end a paper with a conclusion from someone else. You must have the last words. Make them forceful, vivid and sound.

## DIFFERENT KINDS OF LITERARY ANALYSIS

### Example I: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

From Susan Allen Toth, "Mary Wilkins Freeman's Parable of Wasted Life,"  
*American Literature*, 42 (January 1971), 564.

Although Mary Wilkins Freeman has recently enjoyed a small renaissance, one striking short story of hers has remained virtually unknown. This brief parable, "The Three Old Sisters and the Old Beau," published in The Love of Parson Lord and Other Stories (1900), recalls the brooding melancholy and power of that other New England chronicler and allegorist, Nathaniel Hawthorne, to whom Mrs. Freeman has often been compared. Echoing Hawthorne's "The Wedding Knell" in theme and imagery, the tale focuses upon the macabre transformation of a wedding into a funereal ceremonial. With her own compressed and intensive vision, however, Mrs. Freeman uses this contrast to suggest a disturbing insight into New England life in her time.

→ author identified  
→ a story we should notice  
→ story identified  
} statement of theme of story (article will argue that this is the theme)

### Example II: TEXTUAL STUDY OF IMAGERY

From Rebecca Patterson, "Emily Dickinson's Jewel Imagery,"  
*American Literature*, 42 (January 1971), 495.

In early 1862, perhaps about the time she wrote to Thomas Wentworth Higginson for a serious evaluation of her poetry, Emily Dickinson gave her sister-in-law a letter-poem headed "Dear Sue, Your--Riches--taught me--poverty!" (L258). This extravagant contrast between Sue Dickinson's opulent personality and the poet's "poverty" contains some interesting lines:

→ identifies author

Of "Mines" -- I little know--myself--  
But just the names--of Gems--  
The Colors--of the Commonest--

→ quote as a sample of the subject to be studied: jewel imagery

They direct attention toward what may be her most important poetic strategy--the deliberate, wholly conscious search for usable clusters of imagery to incorporate into her work. A brief ① survey of her jewel imagery would suggest that it forms such a cluster and that further examination might throw light on her poetic technique as well as contribute to an understanding of the individual poems. ③

} THESIS: her jewel imagery is an important aspect of her work

Much detail can be gathered from the tables on the following pages. Comparison with other poets, for example, shows that she had considerable precedent for using jewel imagery and that the practice was especially strong in the work of such fellow Victorians as Tennyson and Robert Browning, nor did it die out in the work of modern poets like W.B. Yeats and Wallace Stevens.

} begins with comparison of her jewel imagery with imagery of other poets

Parts of Essay: forecast of organization

- ① survey of imagery
- ② poetic techniques
- ③ individual poems

**Example III:  
STRUCTURAL AND  
THEMATIC STUDY**  
(comparison with another  
work by the same  
author)

From J.R. Scafidel's "Sexuality in Windy McPherson's Son," Twentieth Century Literature, 23 (February 1977), 94-101.

Sherwood Anderson's Windy McPherson's Son (1916) is a book of no great reputation. Despite a number of flattering reviews,<sup>1</sup> Windy has settled down to become little more than Anderson's first published novel and consequently his first notable failure. Apparently puzzled by the chronological proximity of such an undistinguished work as Windy McPherson's Son to Anderson's masterpiece, Winesburg, Ohio, commentators have sought to justify the existence of Windy by linking it thematically to Anderson's later fiction, concentrating on such themes as loneliness,<sup>2</sup> isolation,<sup>3</sup> the fall of man,<sup>4</sup> and the pastoral tradition.<sup>5</sup> When taken on its own grounds, it is usually seen as, to use Irving Howe's words, a "limp and diffuse"<sup>6</sup> work; it is even ludicrous, according to John Ferres, because of the "gap between the author's mystic vision and his articulation."<sup>7</sup> Even as a novel of ideas, apart from structure or design, it is called a failure.<sup>8</sup> Earl Hilton, for instance, interested in Nietzschean elements in the novel, has concluded that "the only distinguishing mark among its ideas lies in the insistence . . . that the successful business man, however misguided in purposes, is still a better and more useful man than the theoretical reformer."<sup>8</sup> In short, the book seems to be a mystery: how could Anderson by 1919, the date of the publication of Winesburg, Ohio, have matured so remarkably in the space of a few years?<sup>9</sup>

One possible way of answering the question is to determine whether the question is valid in the first place. It seems to me that a reader might well begin his study of the novel with the premise that Windy McPherson's Son is a surprisingly mature work in its exploration of the idea of sexuality. A close reading of the book, with emphasis upon the 1916 edition, will reveal, I believe, that Anderson's novel develops and probes into the nature and effects of sexuality with quite the effect of such later works as Winesburg, Ohio and Poor White. To look kindly toward Anderson's sometimes clumsy narration and artificial dialogue and examine the structure of the novel is perhaps to see in Windy McPherson's Son the very art and perception that he combines so effectively shortly afterward in Winesburg, Ohio, his master study of sexuality.<sup>10</sup>

topic (a minor work)

4 ways critics have discussed the book

faults of this book

Problem: a mystery to solve

one type of answer

his answer (the thesis)

method of this article, to describe structure and compare it with Winesburg, Ohio

**Example IV:  
GENRE STUDY**  
(A type of literature)

From H. Bruce Franklin's "Malcolm Braly: Novelist of the American Prison," Contemporary Literature, 18 (Spring 1977), 217-40.

Since the early 1960s, hundreds of books by American prisoners and ex-prisoners have been published--autobiographies, poetry, political and social analysis, plays, anthologies, novels. Many of these authors were civil rights workers, antiwar activists, and revolutionaries imprisoned for their political crimes. Many more, however, were conventional criminals--burglars, murderers, rapists, robbers, pimps, prostitutes, junkies--who became authors because of what they learned while in prison. These authors have written some of the most influential and revealing documents of contemporary culture, such as The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1965), Eldridge Cleaver's Soul on Ice (1968), Piri Thomas' three books, and Soledad Brother (1970) and Blood in My Eye (1972) by George Jackson. We are only now beginning to recognize the historical significance of this body of literature by American "criminals," and the question of its artistic significance is just being articulated.

One of the earliest in this group of contemporary criminals-turned-writers was Malcolm Braly. Braly was a burglar and armed . . .

topic

importance of these books

thesis--the two significant points he will discuss

## The Bullock Report: Literacy and Learning in the United Kingdom

SIX YEARS AGO a committee of prominent British educators headed by Sir Alan Bullock prepared a report for the Department of Education and Science that has since been recognized as a milestone in the history of British education.<sup>1</sup> Appropriately entitled *A Language for Life*, the report provides a thorough investigation into all aspects of language arts in British schools, including the nature of language, its role in child development, and the variety of methods employed in reading and writing instruction. Drawing on the work of Britton, Barnes and Rosen on the importance of talk in the classroom,<sup>2</sup> on research into writing by the Schools Council team,<sup>3</sup> and on several reading projects and programs carried on in both England and America, *A Language for Life*, is one of the most comprehensive studies of its kind, a compendium of tips, theories and research results that together represent the state of the art of literacy instruction. While still generally unknown in the United States, the report has much to offer American language arts teachers, since most of the issues discussed are not restricted by national boundaries. The purpose of this essay is to introduce *A Language for Life* to American readers as an important reference and teaching tool, an indispensable guide to good practice and pedagogy in the field of language arts instruction.

Although originally commissioned after several government studies provided alarming evidence of declining reading standards in the United Kingdom, the report does not single out reading for special attention but places it in close association with other language skills,

particularly writing and talking, and describes it as just one part of a child's general language development. The report deliberately delays a full treatment of the subject of reading until the sixth chapter, leaving room first for an important discussion of attitudes towards the teaching of English and a review of recent theories about the nature of language and learning. The importance of this strategy should not be underemphasized, since teachers in England, like their counterparts in America and elsewhere, had been disheartened by several pessimistic studies of schooling in the late sixties and early seventies which found, as one report put it, "very little evidence of the impact of the school or of specific school factors on the progress of students in reading."<sup>4</sup> Unlike these earlier studies, the Bullock Committee was unequivocal in its view of the importance of the teacher. As they put it in the introduction to the report, "The quality of learning is fashioned in the day-to-day atmosphere of the classroom through the knowledge, intuitions and skill of individual teachers. Whatever else the Report may achieve we regard its first purpose as a support for them" (p. xxxii).

American readers who have been involved in recent developments in writing and reading theory will find much in the report that is useful and at times strikingly familiar. The variety of approaches toward language instruction reviewed in the opening chapter, for example, call to mind any number of meetings of the National Council of Teachers of English or the Conference on College Composition and Communication. Teachers who see English as an instrument of personal growth, who believe activities should develop sensitivity and authenticity, are compared with those who feel emphasis should be placed on direct instruction, drill and rote learning. Those who think English should be an instrument of social change

are contrasted with those who feel their job is to administer spelling tests, teach diagramming and practice elocution. The committee noted how the emphasis on "creativity" at the expense of "formal" work had been blamed for everything from permissive moral standards to poor handwriting, but was quick to point out that its comprehensive survey of over 1800 British schools found no evidence that formal work in English was decaying in a climate of unchecked creativity.

Without endorsing the Back to Basics approach, the committee maintained that standards of writing, reading and speaking can and should be improved, but the solution was not more grammar exercises, formal speeches or comprehension tests:

*We believe that language competence grows incrementally, through an interaction of writing, talk, reading and experience, the body of resulting work forming an organic whole . . . . The teacher's first concern should be to create the conditions necessary for fluency, but then he has a responsibility to help the child improve the technical control of his work. What is the quality of the child's verbalization of his experience? With what fidelity and coherence does he communicate it to his readers? The child should be brought up to see this technical control not as an abstraction imposed from without, but as the means of communicating with his audience in the most satisfying and appropriate manner. His development of this ability can be expressed in terms of increasing differentiation. He learns to carry his use of English into a much broader range of social situations, to differing kinds of audience. The purposes to which he puts language grow more complex, so that he moves from a narrative level of organizing experience to one where he is capable of sustained generalisation. Considered*

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*in these terms the handling of language is a complex ability, and one that will not be developed simply by working through a series of text-book exercises.* (pp. 7-8)

The development of voice and sense of audience were thus seen to be central to the improvement of language ability, and readers familiar with the work of James Britton and the Schools Council Writing Research Unit will recognize the important role he played on the committee. In the committee's view all genuine learning involves discovery, "and it is as ridiculous to suppose that learning begins and ends with 'instruction' as it is to suppose that 'learning by discovery' means leaving children to their own resources" (p. 50). The role of the teacher is to create situations "in which, to satisfy his own purposes, a child encounters the need to use more elaborate forms and is thus motivated to extend the complexity of language available to him" (p. 67). Language itself was shown to have a heuristic function: "that is to say a child can learn by talking and writing as certainly as he can by listening and reading." The surest means of enabling a child to master the mother tongue is "to exploit the process of discovery through language in all its uses" (p. 50).

The Bullock Committee's surveys documented the fact that many teachers in Britain lacked an explicit understanding of the nature of language, and the report called for a greater emphasis on language and its relation to learning in initial and in-service training schemes. The report offers a detailed review of what should be taught in such programs, including the work of Chomsky and his associate, and the theories of both Bernstein and Labov, all presented in a way that readers untrained in linguistics and sociolinguistics can understand and apply. In one of its most important recommendations the committee called on local schools to adopt a language policy across the curriculum, believing that the responsibility for language instruction should not rest with English teachers alone.

Because the committee maintained that "there is no one method, medium, approach, device or philosophy that holds the key to the process of learning to read," it refused to endorse any single system of instruction at the expense of others. "We believe that an essential condition for

bringing about an improvement is a recognition that there is no simple nostrum and above all no substitute for a thorough understanding of all the factors at work" (p. xxxii). The depth of technical detail contained in the report led one wag to suggest that it would take a lifetime to read through all its language, but in spite of its comprehensiveness, or perhaps because of it, the Bullock Report was not ignored. For American teachers trained mainly in literature and only rarely in reading theory, *A Language for Life* offers an indispensable review of contemporary reading theory and practice, from phonics to word recognition, the i.t.a. to the cloze procedure. Without supporting any particular scheme, the committee made it clear that it believed students should be provided with the fullest use of context cues, and that the emphasis of the teacher should be placed at the outset on "purpose, meaning and pleasure." The committee claimed the major ingredient in all successful teaching is not so much the choice of any specific method, but rather the quality of a teacher's relationship with the children, the degree of expert knowledge she possesses, and the sensitivity with which she matches her methods to each child's learning needs.

The Bullock Report also deals with such matters as school management and curriculum design, audio-visual resources and classroom discipline, offering the best practice from the past and present, while emphasizing the need for planning and structure and reinforcing the central theme that language is the essential tool of learning. Although the special needs of minority children were not considered in any detail, Britton appended a "Note of Extension" to the text, and dealt briefly with the application of the Schools Council's categories of writing (expressive, poetic and transactional) to multi-cultural groups, a valuable and useful contribution. The acceptance of dialect is discussed thoroughly in a chapter on oral language, and a careful distinction is drawn concerning the fundamental differences between speech and writing codes. In every case the committee recommended that the child should come first, that curriculum should be responsive to a child's needs, and the teacher should begin from where the child is.

The committee spent a good deal of time reviewing previous reports on

assessment and standards of literacy, and their posture here is also relevant to Americans, particularly in light of recent controversies about declining SAT scores and growing rates of illiteracy. After reviewing at great length all the evidence available on standards of reading, the Bullock Committee concluded that it is not very useful to compare standards of literacy today with those of the past. One of the major difficulties in making such comparisons is the changing definitions of literacy, semi-literacy and illiteracy. Another is the fact that the level of achievement required for participation in the affairs of modern society is significantly higher than what was required in previous years. "It is obvious that as society becomes more complex and makes higher demands in awareness and understanding of its members the criteria of literacy will rise" (p. 11). While condemning the instruments used in the past to measure literacy in England as "narrowly conceived" and of "doubtful validity," the committee recognized that standards reached by students today are sometimes inadequate for contemporary requirements. The committee's conclusions here are consistent with their view throughout the report that the teacher's role should always be one of intervention, working to insure the expansion of a child's awareness of language, and progressive achievement in handling the full range of possibilities offered by mastery of language skills.

When *A Language for Life* was first published in February of 1975, it received the sort of publicity that rarely accompanies the release of a government document. The major newspapers carried editorials in general support of its conclusions, and professional journals were full of articles debating the committee's findings. The *Times Educational Supplement* printed a 12-page summary of the report on February 21, and the United Kingdom Reading Association devoted a special issue of *Reading* to a discussion of the implications of the report in June. For many months the "Letters" section of *TES* was filled with correspondence from teachers and administrators, calling the report "a victory" for teachers, "the sort of reading that should be required in the colleges and in those places where prayers are said for the future of education," as one writer put

it.<sup>5</sup> Not all the initial commentary was positive. Many people complained that the report was too long and too expensive to buy; others objected because it refused to recommend particular schemes or programs. But there is no question that the report had a major impact on the way language skills were to be taught. John Watts, writing in the Winter issue of the journal *English in Education* for the National Association for the Teaching of English, put it this way:

*All in all, the Bullock Report offers a basis for a shift of emphasis in English teaching. . . . It is a shift away from a conception of literacy that merely links certain skills, away from the notion of a High Culture with many poor relations; it is a shift towards a promotion of competence and enjoyment in an increasingly broad field of linguistic activities, differentiated but firmly related, uniting language with literature, concerned with learning of all ages and abilities. (pp. 9-10)*

One year after the report's publication, The *Times Educational Supplement* published the results of a questionnaire sent to the 108 local educational authorities in England and Wales to find out how the report was being followed up. Ninety-six answered the survey, a response which in itself says something about how seriously the report was being taken and how those responsible were trying to raise standards and disseminate good practice. Almost all of the authorities said they had arranged in-service courses and conferences based on the report, and it was estimated that 33,547 teachers had already taken part. Several administrators indicated that they had used the report for major, multi-pronged attacks on curriculum development at all levels. Reading clinics and remedial centers for the diagnosis and help of children with difficulties were established in a large number of schools, and many authorities said they were setting up resource centers where teachers could come to evaluate books, materials and techniques. The survey responses also revealed a good deal of new language activity in schools and in-service courses on language across the curriculum. Some authorities, particularly in London, asked schools to develop explicit statements on language policy.

Two members of the Bullock Committee, commenting on the survey results

and their own experiences in the year after the report's publication, found much to be hopeful about. Diana Hutchcroft said the report was being used almost as a textbook for laying down a language policy in the primary schools, and Michael Marland said it had made a substantial impact on secondary schools as well: "My guess is that from the perspective of 25 years hence, *A Language for Life* will be seen not only to have changed the secondary approach to language, but also to have been one of the first of the necessary unifying forces in secondary schools" (*TES*, February 2, 1976).

More recent commentators have shown how the report has continued to exert a powerful influence on literacy and the

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**"A 16-year-old  
... can be expected  
to talk, listen, read  
and write effectively  
..."**

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teaching of language skills, despite worsening economic conditions and drastic cuts in education. Frederick Poole, headmaster of a primary school in Kent, claimed that the Bullock Report was "a watershed in education—particularly the education of the young," and in an article published in 1978 said that many of its recommendations had already borne fruit.<sup>6</sup> Michael Gerrard, in a survey of recent developments in British education published in the *College Board Review* in the Spring of 1980, claimed the report brought English concerns over literacy into a "powerful focus":

*The report has not been pigeon-holed. A majority of the schools I visited or heard or read about are taking it seriously. . . . Schools are forming working parties, preparing questionnaires, examining textbooks, and sharing their findings with others. The National Association for the Teaching of English has distributed a booklet entitled "Language Across the Curriculum Guidelines," and publications like the "Writing Across the Curriculum Project" pamphlets, J. Britton's *Talking and Writing*, and Michael*

*Marland's *Language Across the Curriculum* are circulating widely. (p. 26)*

The Department of Education and Science, frequently a target of criticism by teachers for failing to move fast enough on the committee's recommendations, incorporated the thrust of the report into a series of papers, entitled *Curriculum 11-16*, prepared for its education inspectors in 1977 and reprinted in 1979. A few quotations from the section on "Language" reveal the degree to which the Bullock Report has helped to shape official policy. After acknowledging its debt to the committee, the DES made the case for a "linguistic education" offered throughout the school years, one designed to insure that students are equipped to meet all the demands the world will make upon them:

*We need to examine our practices in order to discard those attitudes to language which limit pupils' achievement and confidence. We need to make children aware of the conventional aspects, but not to bind them tightly with the conventions. To understand how language works for individuals in society is not to neglect the grammatical and formal qualities; it is to put these qualities into a fuller understanding of the context, the 'audience' and the specific task. Children need to remain confident and adventurous in language, so that they do not become victims of the linguistic designs of others upon them. . . . A 16-year-old at the end of his education can be expected to talk, listen, read and write effectively in a range of situations, and not merely to pass some formal tests in a limited range of language skills. His linguistic education cannot end at 16, however, and the most important expectation is that he should be equipped to continue it thereafter, creating for himself, if need be, the opportunities for doing so. (p. 23)*

Building on the Bullock Report, the DES document called on teachers of all subjects to develop an understanding of the ways in which language is used in effective learning, recognizing that the responsibility for language growth does not lie with English departments alone:

*We need to understand, and to tell pupils more explicitly than we have usually done, what are the opportunities and the constraints in the language of our teaching and their*

learning. Teachers of every subject must balance, at different stages and dependent on the work in hand, the need for such flexibility in spoken and written language as can make the learning more effective, and for understanding and following the appropriate conventions. If all teachers are to play their part in educating all pupils in language, then we shall all need to know about language and to question our opinions and attitudes. The understanding we gain should lead us to the conviction that language matters, but people as language-users matter especially. (p. 20)

The report said teachers of English have a special responsibility "to help pupils to investigate language explicitly in its various forms, and with support from other departments, to keep alive pupils' interests in and response to language":

*Pupils aged 11-16 need help in understanding the relevant features of many kinds of language that touch people's lives—their grammars, certainly, but also the reasons for their grammars which lie in the contexts of their use—in the nature and purpose of the task, the nature of the 'audience', the relation of the speaker and writer with the audience, and the 'match' between language and context. The subject-matter of 'English' will be the study and production of language in variety, and the discovery of similarity, difference and pattern. (p. 21)*

Although it is perhaps still too soon to say conclusively what effects the Bullock Report and the subsequent recommendations of the Department of Education and Science have had on literacy and the teaching of language skills in England, the evidence that is now beginning to come forth leads one to believe that significant progress is being made. The first survey of children's performance in English language in the last year of primary school (age 11), carried out by the Assessment of Performance Unit of the DES, showed that over 96% of the children surveyed had attained sufficient mastery of writing skills to make what they wrote understood on first reading. The report also claimed that most children tested were found to have a "positive attitude" toward reading.<sup>7</sup> Another recent survey conducted by the Policy Studies Institute of 300 employers in England and Wales revealed that over two-thirds of the

businessmen questioned were satisfied with the skills of their young recruits aged 16-18, and only 14% indicated any dissatisfaction with new employees' basic skills.<sup>8</sup> While it would be going too far to say that these encouraging findings are the direct result of the Bullock Report, there is no question that *A Language for Life* has had a major influence on the way language skills are taught in British schools today.

As the work of assessment goes on, the impact of the Bullock Report continues to be felt through teacher conferences, new curricula guidelines and recommended methods of instruction. While there is still much to be done, especially in the provision of language skills instruction for students over 16, the directions recommended in *A Language for Life* are being carefully followed.<sup>9</sup> Although there are obvious differences in national requirements and patterns of educational organization, the conclusions, recommendations and good advice found throughout the Bullock Report could have an influence in American schools at least as great as it has had in the United Kingdom as more teachers at all levels become familiar with them.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>*A Language for Life* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1975). Available in America from Pendragon House, House of Connecticut, Inc., P.O. Box 255, Old Mystic, Connecticut 06372. All further references to this work appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup>James Britton, Douglas Barnes and Harold Rosen, *Language, the Learner and the School* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1971).

<sup>3</sup>*The Development of Writing Abilities 11-18* (London: Schools Council Research Studies, 1974).

<sup>4</sup>R. L. Thorndike, *Reading Comprehension Education in Fifteen Countries* (New York: J. Wiley, 1973). Cited in Joyce Morris, "Children's Reading Achievement in Relation to their Teacher's Attitudes," in *Reading: Implementing the Bullock Report*, edited by E. Hunter-Grunden and H. Grunden, (London: Ward Lock Educational, 1978), p. 134.

<sup>5</sup>Letter by Charles Stuart-Jervis, *Times Educational Supplement*, March 14, p. 20.

<sup>6</sup>"The Bullock Report—Its Relevance to the Junior School," in *Teaching for Literacy: Reflections on the Bullock Report*, edited by Frances Davis and Robert Parker (London: Ward Lock Educational, 1978), pp. 147-157.

<sup>7</sup>The final report was scheduled to be published by the Assessment of Performance Unit in 1981. The findings from a draft report were quoted in *The Times* (London), July 22, 1980, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>The survey was directed by Professor Gareth Williams of Lancaster University and its findings were reported in *The Times Educational Supplement*, August 22, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>The Schools Council has recently begun its English 16-19 Project, and several booklets that build on the work of the Bullock Committee have already been published. See John Dixon's *Education 16-19: The Role of English and Communication* (London: Macmillan Education, 1979).

## BEST TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING WRITING NEGLECTED IN HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOMS, RESEARCHER FINDS

TEACHERS OF ALL high school subjects could be using writing far more effectively to help their students learn. And if more teachers, in history and science as well as English, used current knowledge of how writing can serve learning, their students would become better writers. These are the findings of a new research study, *Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas*, published in late 1981 by the National Council of Teachers of English.

To get to the heart of today's writing problems, researcher Arthur Applebee of Stanford University went inside high school classrooms to find out how writing is actually being taught. In research supported by the National Institute of Education, he analyzed writing activities throughout the curricula of two Midwestern high schools during one school year. He also polled a national practices in assigning writing. His study included taped interviews with teachers and students.

From both investigations, Applebee found that despite today's resources for publicizing effective classroom practices, too many teachers still function in a kind of vacuum, unaware that they are using the kinds of writing assignments, teaching and grading methods least likely to help students learn. Applebee's study shows that most teachers rely on a narrow range of tactics that require students to parrot back facts to a teacher in the role of examiner.

Perhaps his most disturbing finding is that only 3 percent of the writing required in the classrooms studied was one paragraph or more in length. For English classes the figure was 10 percent. Thus, with few exceptions, high school writing tasks are useless for fostering sustained thought on any subject or for developing fluency in handling the language.

Teachers, Applebee concludes, need to be shown the range of possibilities for using writing in less artificial ways, as a tool for learning. This, he says, will require both more research and more concerted effort to help teachers learn effective methods.

## A Love Affair with the Library

I GREW UP IN a family of seven that was still reeling from the economic devastation of the Great Depression. My friends and I, who were all in the same leaky canoe, soon discovered the solace of the library. It became my vast personal empire: I could travel anywhere, see any wonder of the world, live many fascinating lives. I eschewed relevancy because I was steeped in struggle; instead, I yearned for mobility of spirit. This I found in the books of the red brick Williamsburg library on Keap Street, Brooklyn. I also found sociability in the library because our homes were utilized to the fullest. When five siblings are doing homework around a dining room table, or when you cannot be sent to your room for solitary confinement because you share it with two older sisters, there is little privacy. My mother never worried when I said I was going to the library. It was a bastion of safety, particularly since my older sister worked there after school and we could walk home together. We studied in the library, explored in the library, courted in the library, I met my husband in the Brooklyn College library, and sh!, we even talked in the library. As limited as my activities were at home, I never felt deprived. I had the library. It helped me reject the one commodity that would cost me nothing — I rejected ignorance!

The library of my youth was vast, changing, living organism and not merely stacks of books. There I experienced the joy of discovery that was an extension of my family's faith in the nurturing quality of books and the value of education. My mother's most prized possession was the only mahogany bookcase on the entire street. This was before the paperback revolution and each book was acquired or won at great sacrifice. Such are some of

the experiences I internalized; such are the memories which have germinated all these years, now to be recalled.

Subsequently, I became a teacher of Fine Arts at Midwood High School and then of English at Richmond Hill High School. If you think librarians are in a dilemma, talk to art teachers who are the frill of education. However, we thrive on adversity. It was at the Hill that I began to recognize an overwhelming need among my students. This need arose from a parochialism of perception, a paucity of cultural resources, a narrow view of the world and its possibilities, a low image of self and goals, severe deficiency in problem-solving skills.

Through some sense of remembering, through some resonance with my early experiential learnings, through what William James long ago called the electric sense of analogy, I reached out for a solution. It was a solution that had worked for me — why not for my students? Jerome Bruner in his book *Learning and Thinking* explains that learning something in a generic way is like leaping over a barrier. On the other side of the barrier is thinking. When the generic has been grasped, it is then that we are able to recognize the new problems we encounter as exemplars of old principles we have mastered. I recognized the model to follow. I realized that in order to address the needs of my students, I would have to devise a differential curriculum for a humanities based interdisciplinary course of study. Study of the humanities was the basis for my early education and it was made available to me through the consortium of family, teacher, library.

And so in 1974 I organized the first humanities class at Richmond High School. Through a grant proposal I wrote, the National Humanities Faculty designated this class as a pilot program for the development of humanities enrichment in New York State. Twelve grant proposals and five years later, this class has now

become the Problem Solving Skills/Humanities Program, taught on grade levels 9 - 12, involving five disciplines, incorporating a model unit in philosophy with 22 partner teachers of various disciplines. The program was validated by the State Education Department in 1978 and in 1979 was awarded a demonstration grant to identify districts and to train teachers to adopt or adapt the program. The stated goals of the program are the mastery of skills of communication and reasoning and the development of humanistic attitudes which are concerned with the state and welfare of human beings.

The major initial support resource that aided the success of our program was unquestionably the relationship I established with my old friend, the library, and my new friend, the librarian, Mildred Peckman. This remarkable lady possessed the quick intelligence and generosity of spirit to grasp better than anyone in the school my battle against compartmentalized learning. She understood my students who believed that in 1492 the only single event that happened was that Columbus sailed the ocean blue. They could never answer the question that followed: What else happened in 1492? Together, my friend the librarian and I, explored resources at hand. I remember calling her one afternoon of a frenetic day and saying only three words, "Mildred, Charles Dickens." She gathered Jackdaws, visuals, documents, records, articles, book reviews, film strips dealing not merely with Charles Dickens the writer, but a synthesis of the visible and audio evidence of societal forces which whirled around the focus I provided. Together, Mildred and I organized the beginning of a conceptual, not merely structural, cross-disciplinary curriculum.

The planning process was essential to all our work together and this occurred almost daily. This was followed by the implementation or "putting into place" the varied activities which revolved around

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the library. Students visited the library as members of a group, a committee or as individuals pursuing a path of independent study. Mildred was always available as a resource person through a process of dynamic selectivity. For instance, the greatest ally my students had in writing their assigned term papers was Mildred Peckman. I supplied her with a list of hypotheses, she organized resources. I brought students to the library where they received formal instruction on use of references; they met with her in committees or as individuals for guidance, information and support. Mildred and I plan and work together in ordering books and A/V materials germane to the curriculum. Through my grant money, I have embellished the library's resources in areas of philosophy and law; Mildred, on the other hand, evaluates my students' needs in her allocation of funds. Her fastidious organization of multi-media information is equalled only by her gracious gestures of assistance.

The inter-relationships of teacher and student, student and material, librarian and teacher, librarian and student, become cross-indexed, cross-fertilized into a most productive, creative, communication system. The crux of all this is the Socratic process of honest teaching. Honest teaching is the act of pointing and not telling. The teacher, together with the librarian, points to the readings and says to the student, "Here it is — this work or these works are important to you at this time. Now, find it for yourself." The teacher and the librarian help the student make leaps because of the insights that emerge.

An analogy can be made to poetry vs. the didactic. The student and teacher involved in the study or invention of poetry must have room to be involved in the process of discovery; in the process of locating, comprehending, organizing, presenting information. How do we measure the validity of this process? How do we evaluate the efficacy of this relationship? One evaluation standard I use when I travel to schools throughout the state is to visit the library. I can judge the productive level of a student body by the activity and creative use of library resources. These resources should be and happily are being expanded, and more and more libraries are becoming media centers. If our goal is to improve mastery of the skills of

communication and reasoning and the development of humanistic attitudes, then all means of communication must be available as resources. Our students, who are technologically disadvantaged, are brought up on Pabulum and TV; we must set standards of excellence in all media to heighten their sensibilities and make them discriminating consumers and producers.

I have found the library an inspiration, a treasure chest of information and ideas, all my life. It is the remembering of this service to me that I hope to bring to my students. In *The Library in High School Teaching*, Martin Rosoff reminds us that in our search for quality education, the librarian as teacher, administrator, reading expert, media expert, is our invaluable ally. Since students cannot learn everything they need to know about themselves and the world in school, the more valid goal for education is to develop habits of study and reading which endure after formal education. Albert Einstein said it this way — education is what is left after all else is forgotten. What I hope will be left is love of ideas, joys of discovery, respect for the repositories of man's words as he expressed these ideas and joys, and a love affair with the library. ■

## Reading and Writing of John McPhee

(continued from p. 13)

Roomful of Hovings" (New York: Farrar, 1968), and an ecologist in "Encounters with the Archdruid" (New York: Farrar, 1971). Some students might be drawn to reading McPhee because of an unusual title. What was a "deltoid pumpkin seed" (New York: Farrar, 1973)? This article about testing an experimental airship in New Jersey appealed to science fiction readers.

*The John McPhee Reader* (New York: Farrar, 1975) is another good place to start reading non-fiction reading with a class. After reading "Encounters with the Archdruid" (New York: Farrar, 1975), there were so many questions about the Colorado River, the Army Corps of Engineers and desert ecology that we compiled a class list of questions that might lead to further investigation. Next we spent a day in the library compiling a bibliography where answers to these

questions might be found. The titles were varied and represented non-fiction reading in history, regional description, and an explorer's journal, and an ecology protest: John Wesley Powell's *Exploration of the Colorado River* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1875), Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain* (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), Edward Abbey's *Desert Solitaire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968) and Eliot Porter's *The Place No One Knew* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1963). In this way the class was discovering reading material that interested them for report writing.

My crusade to get students reading a variety of materials to help them think and to lead them to read even more was successful. When I see them now, we talk about what we read in class and they remember McPhee's writings.

John McPhee's articles can still be found in the *New Yorker* and one of his latest books, *Giving Good Weight* (New York: Farrar, 1979) is a collection of writings published in the *New Yorker* between 1975 and 1979. In this recent collection you'll find that the topics range from Alaska to an open market in New York City, from building birch bark canoes to restoring old hydroelectric plants and from pinball experts to French cooking masters. Any one of these selections is a good start to lead students to investigate interests and interview friends and neighbors in a new way. Finally, students themselves might continue to read long after they have heard the last teacher say, "And for tomorrow I want you to read pages 175 to 250 and answer the questions on..." ■

# Evaluating Novels for Young Adults

## More than Solipsism and Suffering

ONE OF OUR CONCERNS has been that of elevating the quality of literature available for young adolescents. Too much of what has been published has been cheap: the language has been coded for easy reading — 5th grade at best; the thematic patterns limited to social work crises; the characters, Barbi Doll stereotypes. Perhaps that is the nature of the beast, but we do not believe that YA books must deal only with the egocentricities of adolescent experience seen against a background of the most outrageous adult behavior. There should be more to adolescence than solipsism and suffering.

Many writers for this market believe that writing about prurient sexual or destructive social problems will sell books. Reviewers of these novels are usually writers of the genre themselves. The cycle is completed by publishers vying for this lucrative market by printing ever increasing numbers of titles on every imaginable topic: divorce, parents with live-in roommates, alcoholism, teenage pregnancy, emotional illness and child abuse, adoption and the separation of siblings, incest, crime, and other similar topics.

Perhaps we are fortunate. My 8th and 9th grade students are bored with this fare. They expect more from us and therefore, we can choose not to be corrupted, not to denigrate our students' intelligence and sensitivity, not to succumb to the lure of the easy way out. We can choose material which will offer adult choices and dreams, which will enlarge the heart and the mind, and which will force young people to examine choices on a broad and humanistic scale.

The following reviews reflect our concerns. Elizabeth Patton teaches English in Skaneateles, and is a member of the adjunct staff of Cayuga County Community College in Auburn. She is a poet and an essayist. Claire Samkoff is the English Chair and teaches junior high at Lawrence, Long Island. Gail Hoffman teaches English in Kingston. Her de-

partment has been involved in an ongoing evaluation of novels for young people called, "Seeking Excellence in Reading."

Naomi Zieph Katcher

**FOG** by Mildred Lee (Dell, 1972)

**DAVE'S SONG** by Robert McKay (Hawthorn Books, 1969)

**ONE SUMMER IN BETWEEN** by Melissa Mather (Harper & Row, 1967)

In *Fog*, by Mildred Lee, Luke Sawyer at seventeen learns that life can change abruptly and demand almost too much from him. He has it all — then a fire destroys the security of the boys' clubhouse, his girlfriend leaves him, and his father dies. He learns that decisions are not easy anymore.

For a long time, Luke has resented his father's life as a clerk for Mr. Wilson at the hardware store. When Mr. Wilson offers him a job, he refuses, knowing that he must go to college. He tries to help his mother in her grief and finally, she makes room for him in her suffering. He sees his old gang separating and realizes that his future will require great sacrifice and hard work. In time, he makes peace with his father, understanding that no matter what he becomes in life, he wants to be as good a man as his father was.

Vividly creating day-to-day life in a small town, the author involves the reader with a variety of characters. She writes poignantly of adolescence. Her dialogue sparkles and fades in a very realistic manner. Her portrait of Luke as a young man wandering in an emotional fog proves once again that ordinary people can be heroic.

*Dave's Song*, by Robert McKay, allows the reader to enter the lives of Kate and Dave, two seventeen-year-olds, whose relationship has its ups and downs. Kate more than anything wants to leave Tylerton, Ohio, a small town she considers too ordinary and rural. Dave is just the

kind of arrogant farm boy she wants to leave. Mal Reed, a merchant's son, begins to pay attention to her, and she enjoys the attention. As Kate begins to examine his values, she realizes that Dave Burdick, the chicken farmer, stands up for those issues she considers important. She learns to value him and his family because they live their beliefs.

McKay writes with ease about young people, their families, their problems, and their enthusiasms. He makes the reader believe in his characters. They live, breathe, and change. Kate learns that people may not be what they seem. Not only is Dave a chicken farmer who knows his chickens but also a music lover who shares his music with Kate and a serious student who takes on the power structure to fight for academic freedom. Kate discovers herself in Tylerton and knows that she belongs there. The story moves, and the characters go on living after the last page.

The chapters alternate between Kate and Dave, and the technique succeeds. McKay writes with authority, with humor, and with sensitivity. To write a book for a seventh grader to read easily and for an adult to finish too quickly is quite a literary feat. *Dave's Song* is a winner.

*One Summer In Between*, by Melissa Mather, chronicles a summer on a Vermont farm. What makes this summer different is the arrival of Harriet Brown, a nineteen-year-old Black from South Carolina. The Daleys have employed other college girls in other summers but none they would remember more vividly.

Harriet writes her story in journal entries, which she hopes to incorporate in a sociology paper for college. She discovers time and again that she's one of a kind, and she tries to analyze the motives of the people she meets. She is often puzzled as she tries to analyze the Daleys, who have six young children and who appear to have no time for relaxation. She has never met people who willingly worked so hard. The Daleys are building another house very slowly, and they live in both houses. They work together in the fields, chase escaped pigs, and prepare for the winter. Harriet in one entry, after an intense discussion about race relations, writes, "Let them catch their own pigs and solve their own problems and learn to live with themselves, and leave me alone."

The author has created a lively set of

characters who have accidents, fights, strong opinions, frustrations, and doubts, but, above all, they are resilient. When Harriet writes to her sociology teacher at the end of the book, she has become more knowledgeable about herself, the Daleys, and the world. Anyone reading this novel will see his/her own world in different ways and remember Harriet and the Daleys for a long time.

Elizabeth Patton

**THE FRIENDS** by Rosa Guy (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 1973)

*The Friends*, by Rosa Guy, is a presentation of life's realities for teenagers. Although it takes place in a Black community, the problems of peer acceptance, family relationships and understanding of self are real to everyone. Situated in Harlem, the story revolves around the adjustment of Phyllisia Cathy, a recent arrival from the West Indies, to her new foreign atmosphere and to life with her father, whose arrival in Harlem preceded his family's.

Phyllisia's West Indies' accent arouses the hostility of her adolescent classmates, earning her the appellation of "monkey chaser," and her familiarity with the curriculum is an additional cause for mockery. Keeping to herself does not result in being overlooked, but rather it produces further abuse. Mother preaches moderation, while Calvin Cathy, the father, suggests physical violence, if necessary, to create a place for herself. Neither course of action is satisfactory as Phyllisia searches for her own route.

She is troubled, too, about her physical attractiveness, which, in her own eyes, falls far short of her sister Ruby's natural beauty. Other problems upset her: her inability to come to terms with her bragging father as a human being and the real possibility of a terminal illness for her mother.

In spite of her problems, Phyllisia is made the offer of a deep and protective friendship by Edith, a classmate whose wrinkled clothing and torn socks shame the carefully reared middle class young girl. In spite of her poverty Edith is so devoted to Phyllisia that she willingly shares her possessions with her. Although Phyllisia needs this unselfish friendship, Edith is not acceptable as a friend, since Phyllisia is ashamed of her. Soon Calvin

Cathy, too short-sighted to accept Edith for her loving warmth, bars her from the house. Phyllisia struggles with her need for Edith's friendship, eventually deserting her when Edith needs her most, but returning when maturity brings Phyllisia the understanding of self she had been seeking.

The novel probes deeply into adolescent struggling, with a sensitive awareness of the problems teenagers need to resolve. Readers can easily relate to Phyllisia's day-dreaming, her real terrors with peer acceptance, her inability to communicate with or even understand her father, and the guilt she feels in her relationships with her mother and her best friend.

Claire Samkoff

**MY ANTONIA** by Willa Cather (Houghton Mifflin, 1954)

We can learn much about our country's past and about ourselves by reading well-written works of fiction. It is possible to read *My Antonia* to learn only about the difficulties and hardships of immigrants of the latter 19th century; however *My Antonia* is a narrative which can be read most enjoyably as a story. Willa Cather's descriptions are excellent and help the reader visualize the beauty of the land. Her description of one sunset is particularly vivid: "The curly grass about us was on fire now. The bark of the oaks turned red as copper. There was a shimmer of gold on the brown river . . . The long fingers of the sun touched their foreheads." The descriptive technique also helps the reader understand the characters and in particular the attraction of Jim Burden for Antonia, a woman who "left images in the mind that did not fade—that grew stronger with time." As Antonia kept a photograph album as a reminder of "the precious, the incommunicable past," so the reader of *My Antonia* can capture those moments and the images through Jim Burden's recollections.

The novel is Jim Burden's reminiscences of a Bohemian immigrant, Antonia Shimerda. Both of them arrived in Black Hawk, Nebraska the same night of "obliterating darkness" to start new lives. The novel is divided into the five sections of Jim Burden's life and begins when he is ten years old. His nostalgic recollections cover a span of a little more than 30 years and do not always concentrate on Antonia, al-

though he always returns to her.

Through his memories of the past we share the grief and shock of Mr. Shimerda's suicide during the first winter, the pain and the strength of Antonia's "disgrace" after she has lived in town, the happiness and prosperity of the other Bohemian girls' successes, the emptiness of Burden's own successes in his life. Finally Jim Burden brings us back to Antonia, now married with a very large and healthy family. She has become a symbol of the fertile land which she loves and from which she draws her strength.

In the final scene of the book the narrator is walking over what remains of the road he took the night of his arrival in Black Hawk and the sentimental tone is reinforced by his thoughts: "The feelings . . . were so near that I could reach out and touch them with my hand . . . For Antonia and for me, this had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be." The story of "His" Antonia has come full circle.

I had not read this book in as many years as those which passed between Jim Burden's leaving Nebraska and his renewed acquaintance with Antonia. And yet, the impact of a good story, well told, of a novel whose mood and unity are sustained from beginning to end, was as strong and as positive as the first reading had provided. Sensitive students of 10th grade or beyond should appreciate and enjoy the nostalgic and realistic story of Antonia Shimerda as recollected by Jim Burden.

—Gail Hoffman

## CORRECTION

The name of Robert Parker was inadvertently omitted from the list of authors of *Writing across the Curriculum*, 11-16, reviewed in the last issue by Robert Rounds. Dr. Parker, the only American among the authors, is Professor of English Education at Rutgers University.